

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative: **A Conceptual Overview**

California's extraordinary marine biological diversity is a vital asset to the state and nation. The productivity, wildness and beauty of our coasts and oceans are central to California's identity, heritage, and economy. At the same time, however, the impacts from coastal development, water pollution, certain modern fishing practices, and other human activities are altering and degrading our coastal and marine environment.

In the late 1990s, the California Legislature responded to declines in the state's marine environment with legislation intended to reduce these threats and protect our ocean. Among others, the 1999 Marine Life Protection Act ("MLPA" or "the Act") aims to protect California's marine natural heritage through the establishment of a network of marine protected areas, to be designed, created, and managed according to sound science in order to protect the diversity and abundance of marine life and the integrity of marine ecosystems. The Act recognizes that a combination of marine reserves, marine conservation areas and marine parks can help protect habitat and ecosystems, conserve biological diversity, provide a sanctuary for marine life, enhance recreational and educational opportunities, and provide scientific reference points to assist resource management decisions.

To date, the Marine Life Protection Act has not been implemented as quickly as intended. A realistic approach focuses on strategically prioritizing those program components that can be effectively implemented now, and completing the remaining components in later phases. Acknowledging the importance of protecting the state's ocean heritage, California aims to achieve the goals of the Act by pursuing the California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative, a cooperative effort funded by a public-private partnership, and enhanced by the advice of scientists, resource managers, experts, stakeholders and interested members of the public.

The objectives of the Initiative are as follows:

- **Submit the Department's draft Master Plan Framework to the Fish and Game Commission by May 2005 for proposed adoption by the Commission in August 2005.** As provided in the Act, several components of the Master Plan will provide a statewide framework for the design and implementation of marine protected areas. To that end, a Master Plan Framework based on sound science was prepared to specify programmatic goals and recommendations for the future design, implementation and management of networks of marine protected areas, including necessary monitoring, adaptive management, enforcement, and funding. The Master Plan Framework builds upon work already accomplished by the state under the Act, and includes a prioritized timeline and action plan to design and implement marine protected areas in phases by region between the years 2006 and 2011. This framework was adopted by the Fish and Game Commission in August, 2005.
- **Prepare a comprehensive strategy for long-term funding of planning, management and enforcement of marine protected areas by December 2005** by presenting a package of legislative and other recommendations to the Secretary for Resources to identify new sources of revenue and ensure adequate resources for

quality state oversight of the network of marine protected areas. The Blue Ribbon Task Force has forwarded this plan to the Resources Secretary for review.

- **Design and submit the Department's draft proposal for alternative networks of marine protected areas in an area along the central coast to the Fish and Game Commission by March 2006 for proposed adoption by the Commission by November 2006.** The Central Coast Marine Life Protection Act Project will produce a suite of alternative networks for an area along the central coast according to the Master Plan Framework, in a regional project that incorporates sound science, stakeholder input and general public participation. The adopted alternative will be implemented by the Department of Fish and Game.
- **Develop recommendations for coordinating the management of marine protected areas with the federal government by November 2006.** The recommendations will draw from the recent reports of the United States Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission.
- **Secure agreement and commitment among state agencies with marine protected area responsibilities by November 2006 to complete statewide implementation of the Master Plan by 2011.** By November 2006, the Resources Agency will negotiate a commitment among key public agencies and other interested parties to ensure that marine protected areas are designed and proposed for adoption by the Commission and implemented by the Department of Fish and Game in the remaining regions between 2006 and 2011 in accordance with the Master Plan Framework, and to dedicate funding for the ongoing management of the marine protected areas.

The first phase of the Initiative has been completed, with the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group forwarding potential MPA packages for review by the Blue Ribbon Task Force. After their review, the Task Force will make recommendations to the Department of Fish and Game. The Department of Fish and Game will then select a preferred alternative and make a recommendation to the Fish and Game Commission. After a series of public hearings, the Commission is expected to take action on the issue in November, 2006.

Upcoming Meetings:

January 31 - February 1, 2006 - Blue Ribbon Task Force, Morro Bay

March 2, 2006 - Science Advisory Team, San Luis Obispo Area

March 14-15, 2006 - Blue Ribbon Task Force, Monterey Area

May 1, 2006 - Science Advisory Team, San Jose Area

May 23, 2006 - Joint Fish and Game Commission and Blue Ribbon Task Force, Sacramento

For more information and questions or comments, see the Department's web site at:

www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa